



Remaining the World Energy Leader

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

For decades, starting with Spindletop, Texas produced oil and gas that powered the United States to its 20th century leadership in the world. Even today, Houston is the technological center for energy production worldwide.

Fossil fuels are now being slowly depleted. But Texans are notoriously resilient. So it's entirely appropriate that Texas is re-emerging as an energy king yet again—this time as the national leader in renewable energy.

A study released last month predicted renewable energy production would add 173,000 jobs in Texas, and make a \$22.8 billion impact on our state's economy by 2025. That would make Texas the nation's biggest renewable producer, including biofuels, wind and solar power.

Texas already leads in wind power. Last year, Texas surpassed California as the top state in wind electricity production, and our lead is growing. The nation's largest wind farm is Horse Hollow, a 47,000-acre spread near Abilene. Even bigger ones are planned.

In late June, the U.S. Department of Energy announced that a Texas public-private consortium, the Lone Star Wind Alliance, had been selected to run a large-scale wind research and testing facility at Ingleside, near Corpus Christi. The plant will test next-generation wind turbine blades. Some may exceed 300 feet in length and dramatically increase electrical production.

Use of wind energy goes back to the start of civilization—deploying sails to move boats or windmills to grind grain. In some areas of Texas, you can still see relics of old windmills that brought up water from underneath Texas grassland.

Today, wind energy production is focused on parts of the state where the wind seems to blow incessantly—including the Panhandle, Trans-Pecos, Gulf Coast and West Texas. We're the only state committed to offshore wind development as well.

Wind is a clean source of electricity, but it generates controversy. Critics say wind turbine fields are noisy and threaten wildlife, especially migrating birds. The current owners of two neighboring mega-ranches in South Texas, King and Kenedy, are at odds publicly over Kenedy

plans to lease acreage for wind turbine use.

But over time, the case for renewable energy seems inevitable. One wind energy expert put it this way: "There is plenty of wind, and always will be. It's just like an oil field that doesn't run out."

Increasing use of alternative sources will help reduce our dependence on foreign oil. But they're still not economically competitive with traditional fossil fuels. Even the most optimistic projections have renewables meeting only one-quarter of our energy needs by 2025.

Congress is currently debating energy legislation with incentives for rapid development of alternative sources. The majority believes legislators should pick certain technologies and reject others, backing these decisions with major new government spending programs.

Some want a big tax increase on traditional oil companies to finance these projects. This would increase the cost of gas for Texas drivers, and make our electricity and natural gas more expensive. It would also make American energy projects, and Texas firms, less competitive worldwide.

I have a different view. I believe Washington isn't smart enough to pick and choose, because we need it all—oil, gas, biofuels, solar, wind, nuclear, clean coal and other technologies.

Over time, renewables promise great benefits—to the environment, to our energy security and to our economy. But alternative sources will never meet the entire energy needs for our growth.

Our policy remains in doubt while Congress debates. But one fact appears certain—no matter what direction is taken on energy, Texas will be at the forefront in producing it.

Sen. Cornyn serves on the Armed Services, Judiciary and Budget Committees. In addition, he is Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Ethics. He serves as the top Republican on the Judiciary Committee's Immigration, Border Security and Refugees subcommittee and the Armed Services Committee's Airland subcommittee. Cornyn served previously as Texas Attorney General, Texas Supreme Court Justice and Bexar County District Judge. For Sen. Cornyn's previous Texas Times columns: www.cornyn.senate.gov/column